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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

Christmas is a perpetual reminder of the hidden and silent forces at work in history. It is plain historical fact that, while the once mighty empire of Rome has vanished, from the humble birth at Bethlehem there has sprung a society which twenty centuries after embraces in its membership men of every race and every land.

A UNIVERSAL SOCIETY

Comparatively few people have as yet taken in what the existence of this world-wide Christian fellowship means. It is in fact one of the greatest encouragements in a world torn by dissensions and war. An impressive picture of the wide-flung extent of Christian activities is given in the survey which is the main feature of the January issue of the *International Review of Missions*.[1] The survey is concerned primarily with the countries in which the Church has been planted in the modern period by missionary effort. It presents in turn the activities and problems of the Churches in Japan, Korea, Formosa, China, Malaya, Thailand, British Borneo, Netherlands Indies, India, Burma, Ceylon, Tibet, Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Iran, Iraq, Abyssinia, North, West, Central, East and South Africa, Madagascar, Latin America, the West Indies and the islands of the Pacific. In some of these countries the Church has attained substantial strength, in others it is still in its first beginnings.

That Christians are increasingly aware of the bonds that unite them is strikingly shown by the way in which the Churches in different countries have rallied to the support of those which have been hardest hit by the war. The American Protestant Churches have contributed well over a million dollars to the work carried on by the Churches of other countries. Great Britain and the Dominions have also provided substantial aid, and contributions have been made by the Churches in Sweden, China, India, the Belgian Congo and other parts of Africa. The Roman Catholic Church in America has also assumed a greatly increased share in the support of Catholic missions, and the contributions from Roman Catholics in France to the Society of the Propagation of the Faith for 1940 exceed those of 1938, amounting to over twelve million francs.

An individual instance—trivial, in itself, but full of meaning in what it implies—of the growing sense of the obligations of membership of a universal society is a story from China. A Christian farmer, accustomed to putting his tithe in a blue cloth bag, lost all his possessions through war and flood. A missionary gave him 20 dollars to buy a cart with which he succeeded in a few dangerous trips in making 80 dollars. He paid back the loan, reckoned his tithe not at six but at eight dollars and talked daily about the way in which he should dispose of this to him great sum. The missionary advised him to pray about the matter until some definite need became clear to him. He followed this advice and decided finally to send it for the relief of persecuted Jews.

[1] Edinburgh House, 2 Eaton Gate, London, S.W.1. 3s. Annual subscription, 10s. 6d.

The activities of the Church have been hampered—everywhere to some extent and in some places very severely—by economic difficulties, by the removal of missionaries through withdrawal on a large scale, as in Japan and China, or through internment, and in China by extensive migrations from the occupied to the free areas. But in spite of these handicaps there is evidence of a vigorous life in the courage with which the indigenous Churches have shouldered greatly increased burdens and in the steady perseverance with which work has been carried on in the face of almost overwhelming difficulties.

In China the number of students enrolled in the twelve Protestant Christian universities is over 9,000—half as many again as when the war in China began. The adventures of the Central China College in its migration to the extreme south-west were described in a recent News-Letter (C.N-L. No. 109). The Union Theological College in Canton has also been transferred to the same town, which has up to the present been untouched by western and Christian influence. The department of education in the university has undertaken the teaching of English in the local secondary school and helped the community to improve its educational system. The students are interesting themselves in mass education and teaching large numbers of illiterates to read the thousand characters of Chinese. A campaign has been started for the improvement of health and of local living conditions. The staff and students of the university have made an electrical power plant from the engine of a broken-down motor bus and other local materials and a transformer secured from the coast, and when the electric lights went on the whole town turned out to see the sight.

From the innumerable ways in which the Christian forces are rendering emergency services an illustration may be taken from Hankow, the original home of the Central China College. Here, in a war environment and under frequent aerial bombardment, the Chinese Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis, sixty-three in number, have treated over 135,000 patients, cared for 17,000 refugees, are teaching nearly 2,000 pupils in their schools, have given part-time instruction to 75,000 adults and prepared more than 1,500 for baptism. Christian hospitals, Protestant and Roman Catholic, which are a substantial percentage of the total number of hospitals in China, have during the last five years laboured day and night to care for the wounded and the victims of air-raids, and have co-operated with other Christian agencies of relief in helping many hundreds of thousands of refugees and in providing food for multitudes of starving people.

These services have made a deep impression on the Chinese. This appreciation finds expression in an article in a magazine of Chinese intellectuals which has in the past been hostile to the Christian missions. It says :

> " One of the things that have come out of the present war has been the realization that, whatever doubts may have existed in the past, the Christian missions in China fully and indispensably justify their existence. How without a moment's hesitation they faced the test and were not found wanting will remain one of the most dramatic and epoch-making pages in the history of Christian missions."

These manifestations of the Christian spirit have won the attention of the Communists and led to a rapprochement between them and Christians. The fraternisation has its amusing side. A Christian preacher attached himself to a communist group and, on being questioned, told them that he could do nothing but preach. To which they replied, " Here we are all equal. You may preach, but you must preach eight hours a day."

In Asia, as in Europe, the Church has to face the opposition of a militant nationalism and is subject to pressure from the side of the state. In the Japanese empire it has to meet the attempt to shape education on strongly nationalist and militarist lines and to eliminate Christian teaching from the schools, and is forced or tempted to compromise with both faith and intelligence by participation in the Emperor cult and worship at Shinto shrines. In Iran the government has taken over the schools established by missionary societies with a view to the national control and promotion of all cultural activities. Similarly in

Iraq, while Christian schools are left free to continue their work, legislation has been passed with a view to bringing the whole of the physical and cultural training of the young under direction by the government.

In India, on the other hand, the traditional policy of inviting the co-operation of voluntary agencies in the task of education and of assisting them with liberal grants-in-aid has been maintained by the Indian provincial governments. In Uganda, where the Christian community is large and influential, the Government has announced its intention of entrusting the secondary education of the Protectorate to the Christian schools, Anglican and Roman Catholic, to which generous assistance will be given. The Norwegian Government in London has made a grant of £50,000 to aid the Norwegian missions which have been cut off from supplies from the Churches in Norway. This is being distributed on the advice of the authorities of the Norwegian Lutheran Churches in the United States.

AN ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE NETHERLANDS

It was an excellent move on the part of the Trustees of the Burge Memorial Lecture to invite the Prime Minister of the Netherlands to speak on " The Contribution of the Churches to the Reconstruction of European Life."[1] Dr. Gerbrandy is a convinced Christian who has a wide and intimate knowledge of public affairs. His address has a double interest. The first derives from the practical experience that lies behind his words. The second is that his approach to the subject is different from that of a statesman bred in the Anglo-Saxon Christian tradition and is for that reason a help towards understanding the way in which our fellow-Christians on the Continent look at these matters.

THE CHRISTIAN WORKERS' UNION

An account was given four weeks ago of the "Christian Workers' Union," the aim of which is to make effective contacts with young workers and to restore the connection between religion and work. One of our members, the Rev. F. C. Maxwell, has sent me some important comments on the movement.[2]

He is fully alive to the necessity and importance of an effort with these objectives. The dominant interest of the worker is his livelihood on which depend his security, position, actual or prospective home, and the health and education of his family. What has no special relevance to his work belongs to the circumference of his interest. This is a main reason why the Church fails to appeal to him. The need of Christian Clubs for young Workers, which will help them to see how the Christian faith can make sense of their lives, is therefore vital. But they can be helped only by those who know them in real intimacy, and very few Christians possess this knowledge. Without thorough preparation those who attempt the task are likely to do more harm than good. A knowledge of economics and civics, of industrial psychology and organisation, plain common sense, a real love of people, humility and a willingness to learn from working-class experience are all necessary.

Mr. Maxwell sees danger, therefore, in a broadcast invitation to the clergy to start work on similar lines. He is afraid lest mistaken zeal should lead to the starting of some new guild or recruiting agency for youth without a sufficient understanding of the radical nature of the challenge or of what is demanded of a movement that can successfully meet it. There is as yet very little understanding of working-class culture, and a movement that is not intimately related to this, and to the real life of the neighbourhood, has little prospect of success. Moreover the dangers of clerical dominance in such a movement are not removed by calling the clergy " priest-advisers."

The greatest danger, however, in such a movement, if there is behind it nothing more than uninformed good will, lies, in Mr. Maxwell's view, in the relations with trades-unions. The study of the conditions in a particular industry is a constant pre-occupation of the trade-union concerned, and it is able to take responsible action on behalf of the

[1] Student Christian Movement Press, 6d.

[2] The comments are published in full in the *Central Youth Council Review* (The Rev. A. G. Hardie, St. Albans Church, London, N.W.11. 2½d. *post free*).

workers as a whole. It is natural for it to resent interference by an outside body composed of amateurs, who may not have a balanced judgment of the relative importance of various aspects of the question, and may unintentionally undermine the solidarity and authority of the trade-union. At any rate an understanding with the local trade-union leaders is an essential preliminary to the starting of a group. Contacts need also to be made with local industrial management, welfare officers and the employment exchange. It is an impertinence to try to give a deeper meaning to industrial life except in the closest consultation with those who are professionally concerned with it and who are often inspired by a high sense of vocation.

CHRISTMAS

I refrained in last week's Supplement on " All Real Life is Meeting " from drawing the connection between what was said and the event which we celebrate at Christmas, for the reason that we sometimes gain a fresh insight into the meaning of Christian ideas when they are expressed in other language than the traditional language of Christian piety. But it must have occurred to many of you how little more was needed to make the Supplement an exposition of the heart and substance of Christianity. In what framework could the core of Christianity find more adequate expression than in the idea of meeting as interpreted in the Supplement ? The content of the meeting is expressed in words so tremendous that our dull minds fail to take them in.

The Word became flesh.

Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

We beheld his glory.

That whosoever *believeth* in him should have eternal life.

He saw James the Son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were in the boat mending the nets. And straightway he called them.

And out of this meeting was born the new society which was to be a community of love.

We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.

Walk in love, even as Christ also loved you.

If we understood these things, something of the gladness of those who composed our Christmas carols would come back to us and it would be natural for us to sing :

> Aye, and therefore be merry ;
> Rejoice, and be you merry; Set sorrow aside;
> Christ Jesus our Saviour was born at this tide.

The staff of the Christian News-Letter wish you all a very good Christmas and good New Year.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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